





DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF  
Hiroki Matsukata  
(1942 - 2017)

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# OPS vs THUGS

県警対組織暴力  
Kenkei tai soshiki boryoku

Original release date: 26 April 1975  
101 minutes

Directed by **Kinji Fukasaku**  
Screenplay by **Kazuo Kasahara**  
Produced by **Goro Kusakabe**  
Director of Photography **Shigeru Akatsuka**  
Lighting by **Haruo Nakayama**  
Audio Recording by **Masayoshi Mizoguchi**  
Production Design by **Norimichi Ikawa**  
Music by **Toshiaki Tsushima**  
Edited by **Kozo Horiike**  
Assistant Director **Toshiyuki Fujiwara**

## THE COPS:

Detective Kuno: **Bunta Sugawara**  
Lieutenant Kaida: **Tatsuo Umemiya**  
Kawamoto: **Shingo Yamashiro**  
Yoshiura: **Asao Sano**  
Shiota: **Akira Shioji**  
Assistant Chief Ikeda: **Jukei Fujioka**  
Assistant Chief Miura: **Mizuho Suzuki**  
Chief Otsubo: **Eizo Kitamura**  
Assistant Detectives:  
**Shotaro Hayashi**  
**Masaharu Arikawa**  
**Seizo Fukumoto**  
Kuno's wife: **Sanae Nakahara**

## THE THUGS:

Kenji Hirotani: **Hiroki Matsukata**  
Tsukahara: **Hideo Murota**  
Okimoto: **Harumi Sone**  
Boss Ohara: **Tatsuo Endo**  
Komiya: **Kunie Tanaka**  
Onuki: **Masataka Naruse**  
Satoru (Dunhill lighter): **Satoru Nabe**  
Ohara gang members:  
**Yusuke Tsukasa**  
**Ryuji Katagiri**  
**Yuri: Yoko Koizumi**  
Kasumi: **Maki Tachibana**

Boss Kawade: **Mikio Narita**

Matsui: **Takuzo Kawatani**  
Kawade gang members:  
**Masataka Iwao**  
**Akira Hirasawa**  
Mariko: **Reiko Ike**  
Matsui's wife: **Midori Shirakawa**

## THE OTHERS:

Assemblyman Tomoyasu: **Nobuo Kaneko**  
Mayor Mukai: **Yasuhiro Shima**  
Nikko Oil Chairman Kubo: **Hosei Komatsu**  
Police Commissioner Kikuchi: **Toru Abe**  
Lawyer Tsukada: **Yasuhiro Suzuki**  
Sailor: **Sachio Miyagi**  
Dump truck driver: **Kenji Ikeda**



# TRUE CRIMES: BEHIND THE SCENES OF *COPS VS THUGS*

by Patrick Macias

This is a bittersweet time for fans of yakuza cinema. On one hand, many classics of the genre, which once languished in obscurity or were confined to bootleg-only status, have finally gotten legitimate releases outside of their point of origin in Japan. But, alas, many of the staff and cast that made these larger-than-life films are increasingly no longer with us.

In 2014, actor Bunta Sugawara – the tough-as-nails icon of Toei's *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* series (*Jingi naki tatakai*, 1973-74) – succumbed to liver cancer. And in early 2017, Hiroki Matsukata died of brain lymphoma at the age of 74. But their work alongside each other in *Cops vs Thugs* (*Kenkei tai soshiki boryoku*, 1975) leaves behind one hell of a legacy.

Matsukata's oversized performance as gangster Hirotani in *Cops vs Thugs* deftly swerves from threatening to comedic on a dime, while Sugawara's turn as Detective Kuno catches him right at the moment where his range as a dramatic actor began to deepen and expand. Directed by Kinji Fukasaku, then at the very peak of his yakuza filmmaking powers, *Cops vs Thugs* shows what the talents involved in Toei Studio's famed *jitsuroku* ("true document") series did at their very best: offering tough and cynical social commentary in an explosive entertainment package. But making such films was not without risks, especially when actual conflicts between gangsters and the police spilled over into production.



In 1973 and 1974, Toei studios had hits with a pair of films – *Third Generation of the Yamaguchi Gang* (*Yamaguchi-gumi sandaime*, 1973) and *Third Generation Successor* (*Sandaime shumei*, 1974) – which were based on the life and times of Kazuo Taoka, the head of Japan's largest underworld organization, the Yamaguchi-gumi. But the Hyogo Prefectural Police, who were then in the middle of an anti-gang crackdown, objected to the films' chivalrous portrayal of an underworld figure they'd been battling for nearly three decades (who was played in the films by the iconic Ken Takakura, no less).

Seeking to bring the relationship between crime boss Taoka and the studio's yakuza films to light, the police raided Toei's headquarters along with producer Koji Shundo's private residence. Hounded by the authorities and the mass media, Toei Studio's president Shigeru Okada assumed responsibility for the crisis and duly cancelled the proposed third film in the *Yamaguchi Gang* series, which had been planned as Toei's big New Year's release for 1975.

As part of the fallout from the police investigation, Toei was banned by the city of Hiroshima from filming on location for their upcoming *New Battles Without Honor and Humanity* films. The studio, along with its president, had to go on a public relations offensive, and fast.

One day, while using the bathroom, stressed out studio head Okada had a eureka moment when the movie title *Kenkei tai soshiki boryoku* (*Cops vs Thugs*) suddenly popped into his head. He immediately rang up *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* co-producer Goro Kusakabe and ordered him to make a movie based on the title alone.

Screenwriter Kazuo Kasahara was the next to be contacted by the enthusiastic Okada. Kasahara thought that the title was kind of "lame" but an order from the company president meant the film had to made ASAP.

After writing four of the five entries in the core *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* series, Kasahara had become a specialist in Hiroshima gangster lore (Japanese fans refer to him as "The Shakespeare of Hiroshima Dialect" for his endlessly quotable lines). In addition to recycling some bits that didn't make it into the *Battles* series, Kasahara headed off to Hiroshima once again to conduct additional interviews with his contacts to help give *Cops vs Thugs* proper "true document" credentials.

As production on *Cops vs Thugs* gained steam, many other participants from the previous *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* titles were called to duty once more; this included director Kinji Fukasaku, yakuza thespians Bunta Sugawara, Hiroki Matsukata, and Tatsuo Umemiya, along with composer Toshiaki Tsushima, whose funky and menacing musical cues reach full bloom here.

But before the cameras could roll, Toei had a few more tricks up their sleeve. The studio issued a press release stating that *Cops vs Thugs* would be the first in a new series of films called the "*Keisatsu rosen*" or "Police Line". Whereas previous Toei films had rarely (if ever) shown the cops in a positive light, the first installment promised to show "the last gasps of the organized crime syndicates while being pursued by the police authorities." Toei seemed to be turning over a new leaf and claimed, "Until now, we have never been able to obtain cooperation from the police for filming, but now it is something to look forward to!" Of course the final film is anything but a simple tale of gangbusters smashing a racket – it's more like a complex web of corruption and twisted loyalties filtered through Fukasaku's trademark cynical take on authority – but the studio's spin and sweet talk did some good...despite the fact that it was the only film ever made in the "Police Line". *Cops vs Thugs* was allowed to film in Hiroshima, although the city's name had to be changed to the fictitious locale of Kurashima.



Originally, former Nikkatsu youth idol Tetsuya Watari (of *Tokyo Drifter* [*Tokyo nagaremono*, 1966] fame) was tapped to play the role of gang boss Hirotani. But he had been ill throughout the filming of Kinji Fukasaku's grim and downbeat *Graveyard of Honor* (*Jingi no hakaba*, 1975) and had to pass on *Cops vs Thugs*. Instead, Hiroki Matsukata stepped into the Hirotani role and it is difficult to imagine the film without his larger-than-life performance.

Born in Tokyo in 1942, Matsukata was born into a family of period film actors and debuted onscreen in 1960, while still in high school, in the youth crime pic *17-year Old Counterattack: Violence Killing* (*Junana-sai no gyakushu - boryoku wo butsubusu*). Matsukata found a home at Toei, where his father, period samurai film star Jushiro Konoe, worked, and he became a regular face in the studio's program pictures throughout the decade, at first in heroic parts usually involving action and swordplay, but then in increasingly dramatic parts as chivalrous yakuza movies took over the production slate. After brief stints at Daiei and Shochiku studios, Matsukata came back to Toei just in time for their "true document" film boom with major parts in the *Battles Without* films, *Escaped Murderer from Hiroshima Prison* (*Datsugoku Hiroshima satsujin-shu*, 1974), *Okinawa Yakuza War* (*Okinawa yakuza senso*, 1976) and Fukasaku's *Hokuriku Proxy War* (*Hokuriku dairi senso*, 1977). Often co-starring with Bunta Sugawara and other top Toei stars, Matsukata stood out thanks to his unique gentleman rogue-like demeanor. There's something oddly lovable about even his most ferocious characters, along with a touch of tarnished nobility that perhaps rubbed off from his old samurai film days. As the yakuza boom faded away in the late seventies, Matsukata doubled down on TV drama appearances and diversified in the decades ahead, appearing in commercial ads, countless variety and game shows, and even immortalizing his personal hobby with "Hiroki Matsukata's World Fishing" video games. He continued to make film appearances throughout his later years and a fantastic turn in Takashi Miike's remake

of *13 Assassins* (*Jusan-nin no shikaku*, 2010) stands as a capstone to Matsukata's long career.

While Bunta Sugawara and Hiroki Matsukata dominated the screen in *Cops vs Thugs*, Toei bit player Takuzo Kawatani was at the center of one of the film's most memorable moments when his lowlife punk character Matsui gets a brutal interrogation at the hands of Sugawara and actor Shingo Yamashiro. Kawatani claimed he had once been roughed up by a gang of policemen before, so he knew what it would take to sell his scene. During filming, he asked Yamashiro to hit him harder, and Fukasaku allowed both him and Sugawara to work over Kawatani for real. His face was said to be a mass of bruises the next day. But the sacrifice paid off: Kawatani (who died in 1995) received much attention for his part and became one of the brightest stars of the *Piranha Gundan* or the "Piranha Army", Toei Studio's own rat pack of wise guys and yakuza character actors.

*Cops vs Thugs* was set for release in late April 1975, during Japan's Golden Week holiday, when studios competed for ticket sales by bringing out some of their biggest pictures of the year. But this time, the latest tough and gritty Bunta Sugawara movie had to compete with rival films starring top female idols of the day like Junko Sakurada and Momoe Yamaguchi. As the press played up the unlikely three-way battle, Toei planned a meet-and-greet onstage event where Sugawara would be surrounded by members of their advertising department dressed as policemen. But not wanting to get on the bad side of the authorities yet again, the idea was nixed. Toei wound up releasing *Cops vs Thugs* on a double bill with *The Great Chase* (*Karei-naru tsuiseki*, directed by Norifumi Suzuki), the latest vehicle starring Etsuko Shihomi, who was then a major female idol in her own right for her action-packed *Sister Street Fighter* films (*Onna hissatsu-ken*, 1974-76), which probably helped rope in the crowds. Either way, *Cops vs Thugs* was crowned the box office winner on



opening day. For Sugawara, the film's success was a matter of pride, and he was quoted as saying "Losing to TV personalities would be a shame upon my profession."

*Cops vs Thugs* performed well critically, too. Kinji Fukasaku was named "Best Director" and Bunta Sugawara "Best Actor" at the 1976 Blue Ribbon Awards, selected by film reporters and critics in Japan.

Even as Kinji Fukasaku, Bunta Sugawara, and Hiroki Matsukata went on to make more films in the genre together, the fiery lead performances and behind-the-scenes drama helped to make *Cops vs Thugs* something special: a high watermark for yakuza movies, both in the 1970s and beyond. As Takashi Miike once said, "These days, we would never be able to make the films we saw in our childhoods like *Battles Without Honor and Humanity* and *Cops vs Thugs*."

**Patrick Macias** is the author of *TokyoScope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion*.





## ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*Cops vs Thugs* is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 and with its original mono sound. The film was remastered in high definition and supplied for this release by Toei Company, Ltd.

## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet produced by: **Marc Walkow**  
Executive Producers: **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer: **James White**  
QC and Proofing: **Nora Mehenni, Marc Walkow**  
Blu-ray and DVD Mastering: **SilverSun**  
Subtitling: **The Engine House**  
Artist: **Ian MacEwan**  
Design: **Obviously Creative**

## SPECIAL THANKS

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